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December 22, 2006

Robert L. Carothers
President

The Honorable Tom Coburn, M.D.
United States Senate
Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management,
Government Information and International Security
United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
439 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Coburn:

This is in response to your letter requesting information on Congressionally-directed funding received by the University of Rhode Island.

The University of Rhode Island has received Congressionally-directed funding for several projects that allow it to achieve its mission of engaging in research, teaching and outreach for the benefit of society. The university has strategically used this funding to expand its capacity to conduct the peer-reviewed research that is the cornerstone of scientific inquiry. Congressionally-directed funding thus has contributed in a substantive way to our academic institution.

The URI Transportation Center is an excellent example of the way the university has used Congressionally-directed funding to leverage competitively distributed research dollars. It is one of 27 national centers supported by the U.S. Department of Transportation. The goals of all centers in this program are to support peer-reviewed research, to increase the number of faculty and staff interested in the transportation field and to ensure that scientific discoveries are translated into practical benefits.

Each year the center funnels much of its funding into an internal grant competition for seed money for transportation studies. The results of these studies have had wide-ranging impact, affecting such areas as traffic safety, environmental protection and cost effectiveness. Most of the results are published in peer-reviewed journals; many have been used to improve the nation's transportation infrastructure.

To encourage more students to study transportation, the center conducts a Summer Transportation Institute in which a diverse group of middle-school students engage in field trips, computer simulations and the operation of heavy machinery. An annual Career Day attracts more than 1,000 high school junior and seniors who learn about the many employment opportunities in the field. At the university level, URI participated in a student exchange with the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez. Students were selected competitively and received Eisenhower Transportation Fellowships.

Another exciting project for which URI is using Congressionally-directed funding is an Environmental Biotechnology Initiative. Biotechnology has had a major impact on agriculture and medicine in recent years, so it is important to any research university as well as to economic growth. URI has used these federal funds to leverage a state bond issue of \$60 million for the construction of a new building to house a biotechnology center. Federal funds are also used for laboratory equipment and to hire new faculty with expertise in biotechnology. In this way, the university is building capacity to conduct research with competitively awarded dollars. The university is particularly strong in the areas of plant biotechnology, aquaculture biotechnology, insect-borne disease and microbial pathogenesis (bioterrorism).

At URI's Cancer Prevention Research Center, earmarked funds have been used to expand the center's ability to perform peer-reviewed research supported by the National Institutes of Health. The center receives millions of competitively awarded research dollars to carry out its work in promoting smoking cessation and other work that helps to save lives. Similarly, earmarked funds have been used to expand the university's community-based tick control program. Rhode Island has one of the highest rates of Lyme disease, a tick-borne illness, in the country. The disease, which is potentially life-threatening, is becoming more prevalent as ticks expand their range into urban areas. The tick-control program complements peer-reviewed research on a tick vaccine and related work.

Projects funded through earmarks must meet the same standards of excellence as all other campus projects. As the above descriptions show, these projects have met or exceeded their goals in every instance. Of course, all federal grants and contracts must meet the standards set forth in the Office of Management and Budget's Circular A-21, Costs Principles for Educational Institutions. In addition, we are subject to federal audits. In short, Congressionally-directed funding is handled the same way our other federal grants and contracts are. You will see from examining a list of our awards that we do not distinguish between the two in the course of carrying out the work. You can view these at www.uri.edu/research/tro/annual_report_2005_06. Listing of our awards in previous years back to 2001 is available at: www.uri.edu/research/tro/annreptarchives.htm.

Our policy is to keep our Congressional delegation apprised of those university needs and priorities where federal support would be most helpful in furthering our mission. Each year the deans send a list of priorities to me as the university president. I review the requests with other senior officials at the university before sending the final version to our legislators. We view this as a continuing collaboration for the betterment of public higher education. The results speak for themselves.

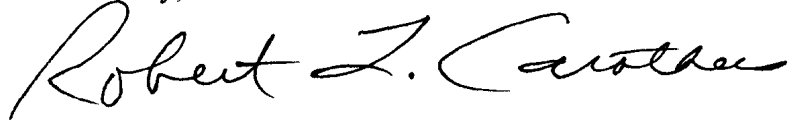
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Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the important role that Congressionally-directed funding plays in supporting excellence in public education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert L. Carothers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "R" and "C".

Robert L. Carothers
President